

A History of Dexter 1850 to 1924.

In the early 1850s, Andrew Neal, Henry Sadler, Random Ladd, Levi Norman, James Lingo, and some of their grown children were among the names of those who settled on land in the area now known as the Sadler's Chapel neighborhood, which was described on land records as section 8 Township 25 Range 10, situated northwest of present day Dexter, Missouri.

Other families living in the area named on the 1860 census included Jarrell, Gaines, Majors, Montgomery, Edwards, Shipman, McElwrath, Culbertson, Rainey, Hagy and Vaughn. Before 1860 the Dowdys, Garners, Minton, Howells, Fields, Riddles, Vandergriffs, Normans, Lamberts, Gaines, and others made their home west and southwest of Dexter. The Civil War separated and scattered many of those early families:

Before the year 1869 the spot we now call Dexter was covered with a large forest, then as far as we know all had never been touched by human hands. There were no roads here only paths such as are made by wild animals leading to their homes and favorite drinking holes. *The Indians would come from the Cape Girardeau area and camp in the hills north and east of where Sadlers Chapel Church is now located to hunt for game in the fall and early spring.*



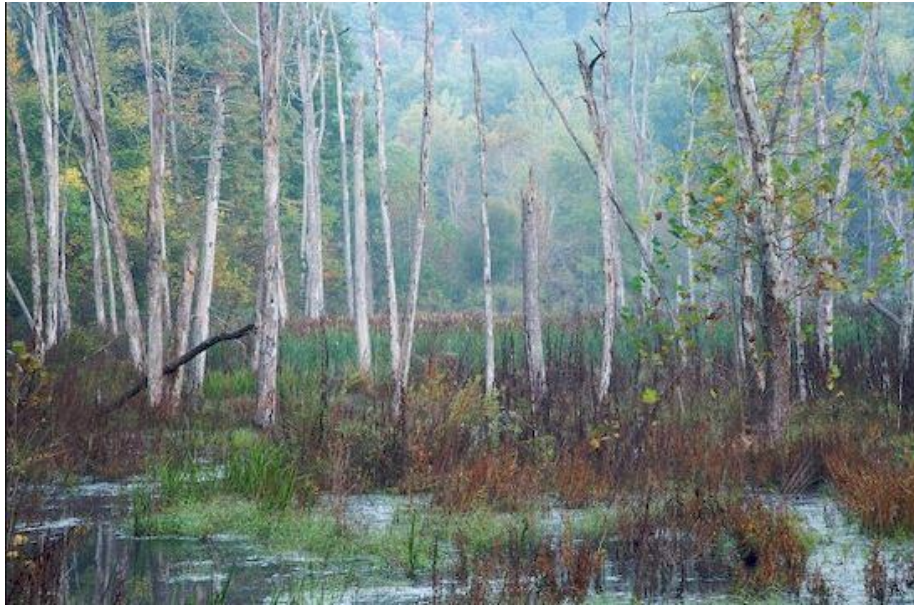
Sadlers Chapel

This large forest was located on a hill at the east end of what was known as "Beavers Pond." Large beaver dams were built across the water that stood on the ground that is now known as the "Lizzie Wilson" home place. (*Where the Dexter Pond is now located, just north of Market street and east of One Mile Road near the Dexter Police Station*).

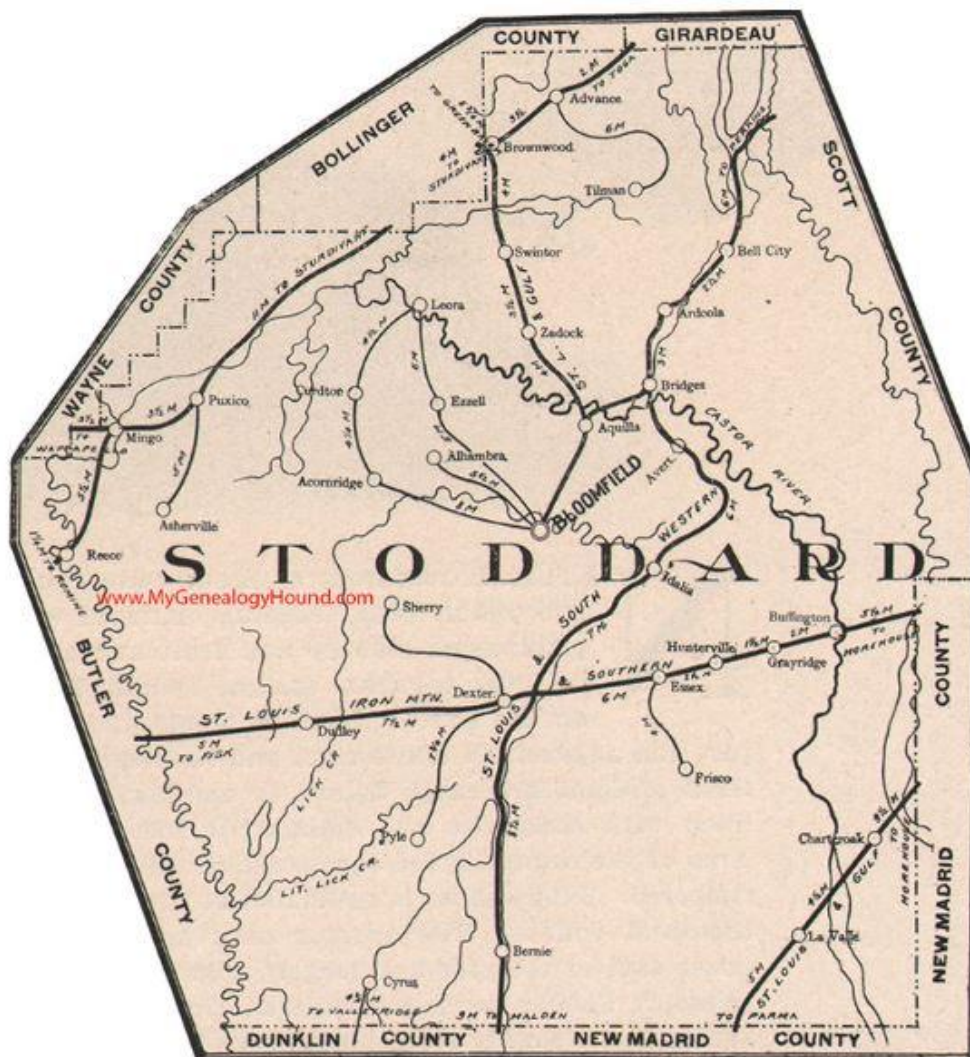


These dams cause the water to spread over a great area of land now owned by J.J. Dowdy and Lee Williams. It spread as far north as John Norman's and Jeff Raney's land. The State Highway west of town was built on ground that at one time was covered by this water.

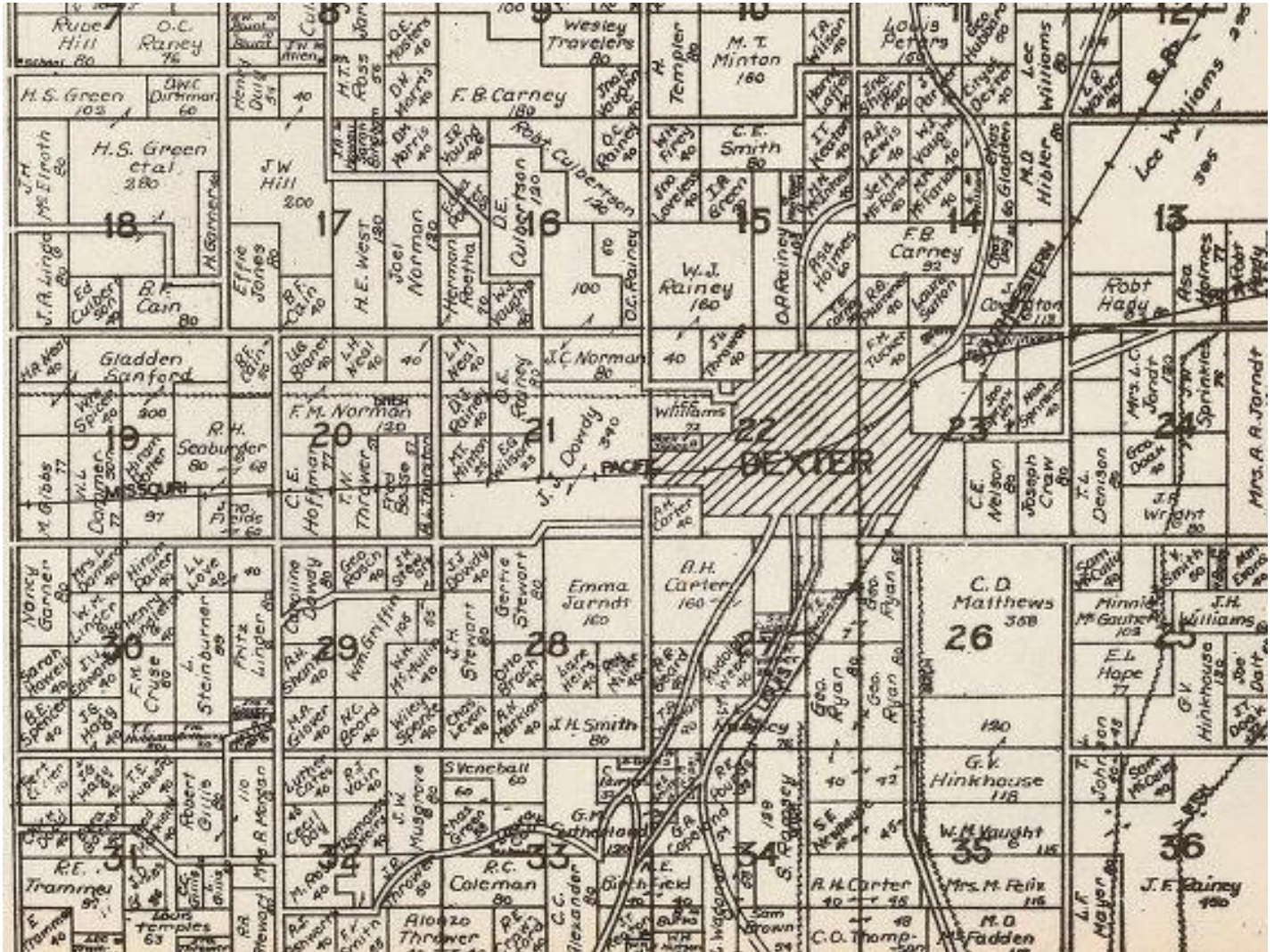




Before 1869 there was a road that led from Cape Girardeau to Kennett. This road was then known as the Cape road. At this time we know it as the Dexter and Bloomfield road. Bloomfield was the nearest trading town for the people around what is now Dexter, so this Cape road was the main highway at that time.

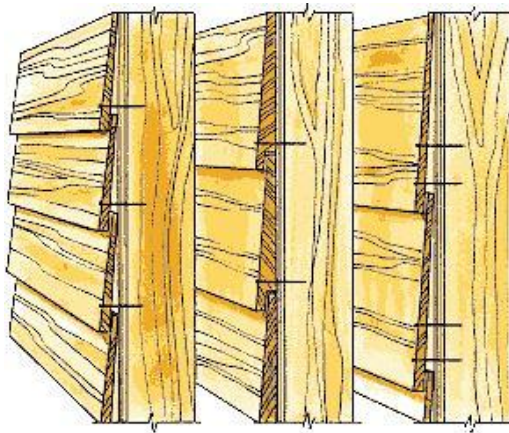


On this road, near what is now Dexter, homes were built by Abner Warren, John Sitton, James Sprinkles, John Miller and a Mr. Williams, a Mr. Webb and a Mr. Linsey.



Plat Map of early Dexter

The John Sitton home is still standing where it was built around 1869. *The John Sitton home is at the northeast corner of the Dexter Cemetery. The Webb-Sprinkles Cemetery is located on the hillside just east of the Dexter Cemetery and the Duncan Cemetery is located just south of the John Sitton property. There is a Colored Cemetery on the southeast corner of the Dexter Cemetery.* These houses were made of logs covered with clabboards (or clapboards, a long, thin board, thicker along one edge than the other, used in covering the outer walls of buildings, being laid horizontally, the thick edge of each board overlapping the thin edge of the board below it.)



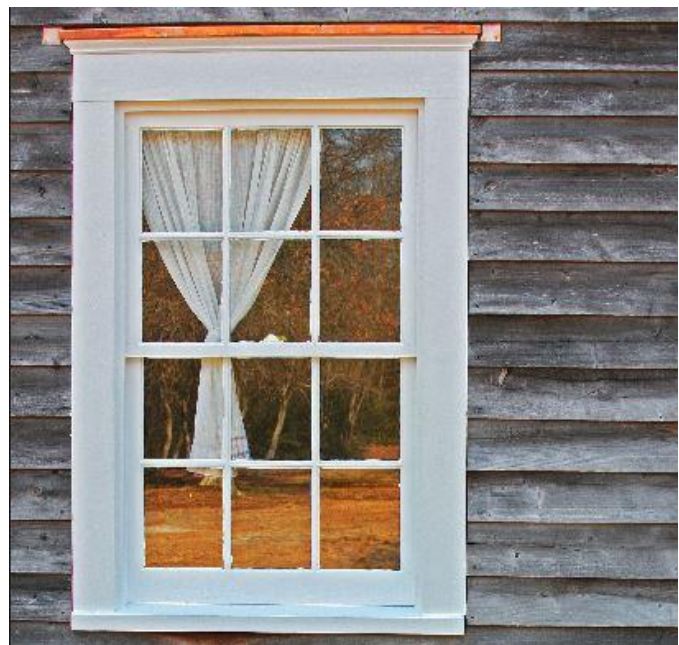
Clapboard or Lap Siding



and had stick and dirt chimneys.

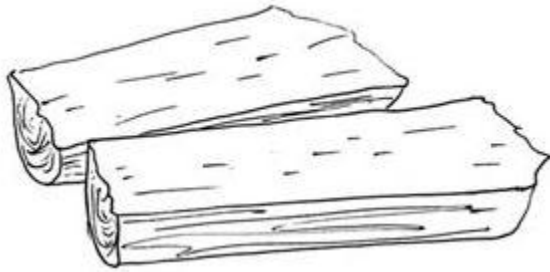


Stick and Dirt Chimney

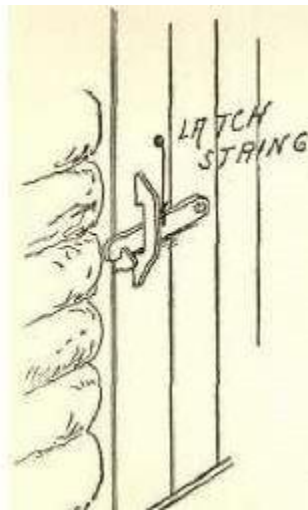


Clapboard Window

Some of these houses had puncheon floors.

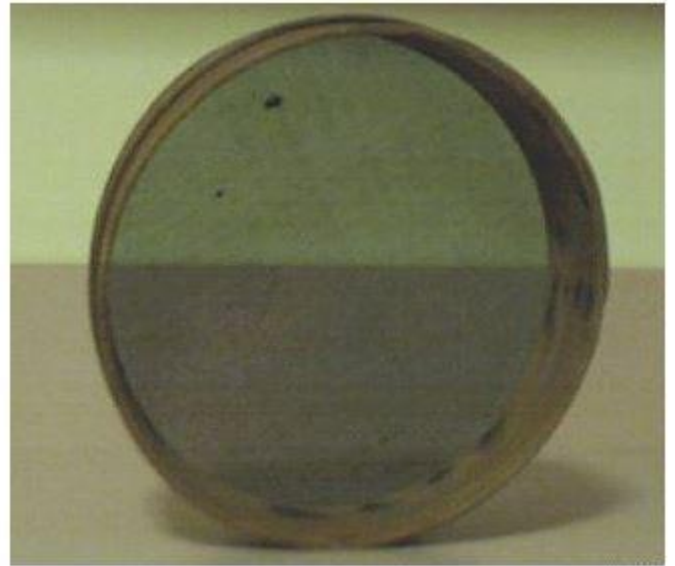


(Puncheon floors were made of debarked logs split in half and set with the flat, smoothed, side up and the rounded side down. As winter progressed and the woodpile ran low, lengths of puncheon were taken up and trimmed on the rounded side with a hatchet, to make kindling for the fire. By Springtime, the flooring had been reduced to flat boards, which could be used for patching or building farm structures, and the puncheons were replaced. Puncheon furniture is still used in rustic settings, such as cabins. They are made of split logs, flattened on one side. Holes are bored for the insertion of smaller lengths of wood for legs. A large-diameter slab of cut tree trunk can also be used, standing on end, as a chopping block, anvil block, or other work surface. In this way, sturdy and lasting furnishings can be made at little or no cost.)

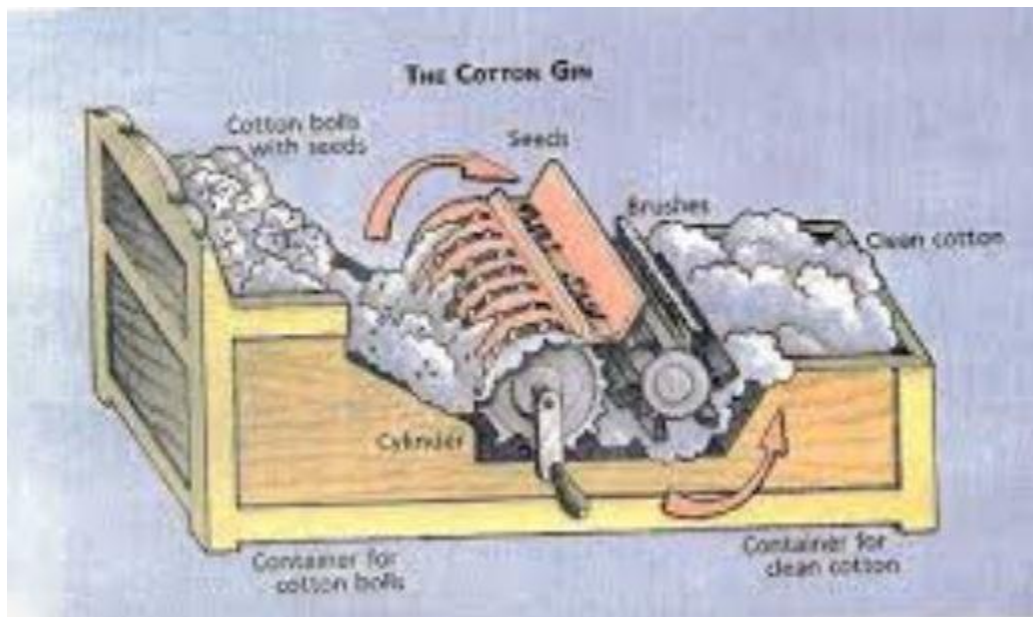


and the latch string hung outside. All of you had to do was to pull the string and walk in. These houses were double with a wide entrance between.

One mile south of what is now Dexter, Mr. John Miller ran a mill. This little town was called Miller's Mill. In one large building was a grist mill in which they ground wheat and corn on the same burrs (*grindstones*) and bolted (*sifted*) the flour by hand.



Flour Bolting (Sifting) and Bolting Cloth,

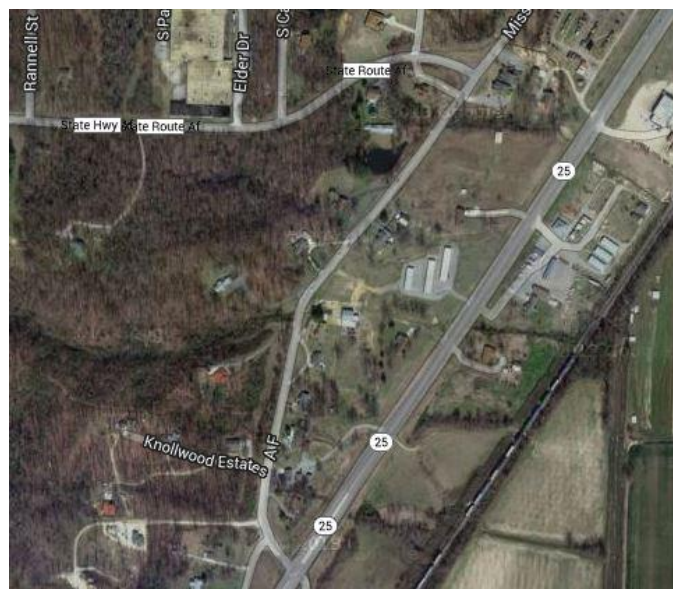


A cotton gin



And a cotton press.

Near this mill was a store, a saloon, a blacksmith shop and, and a wood shop. John Miller was the father of J. N. Miller, one of Dexter's first businessmen. *The Millers Mill was located somewhere south on Walnut Street down the hill to about where business route #25 runs into State Route #25.*



Miller's Mill Location

About 1 mile south of Miller's mill was a railroad right of way known as the old Fulton road. On this right of way was a tread mill and a few houses.



Horse Tread Mill

Here were tracks where many races of the county were run. This place was named Saint Luke. During the Civil War this right of way was destroyed and because of this no more improvements were made at Saint Luke. *The old Fulton road and track at Saint Luke's was on south from Miller's Mill about one mile.*



In the year 1869 the Cairo, Arkansas, and Texas railroad company started building a line now known as the CAT line. (*The Cairo and Fulton Railroad of Arkansas was chartered on February 9, 1853. By 1871, over 301 miles of track had been completed running from the Texas state line to the Missouri state line (via Arkansas). In 1873, the line reached White River, with Texarkana being reached the following year. In 1872 the line reorganized as the Cairo, Arkansas and Texas Railroad Company. In 1874, the railroad re-organized once more as the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railway.*)

This line came over the hills north of Miller's mill. Between two of these hills ran Dex creek. This creek was named for a Mr. Dex, who owned a farm on the banks, near what is now the Martin Hagy farm. *The Martin Hagy farm was located in what is now called the cotton belt from where the old (Swift's) (Dexter Poultry) (Tyson) poultry processing plant is located and to the north.*

On a farm on the banks of the creek, a Mr. Webb raised a fine racehorse and called him Dexter, after the creek. This horse, one of the most famous racehorses of his time won many of his races on the tracks at Saint Luke. It was not strange that E.W. Deal who had the contract for the building the dump and clearing the right of way for the railroad company should name his camp on the creek Dexter, after this famous racehorse.



Mr. Deals camp consisted of a boarding house, a store, and a saloon. He furnished his men most of their supplies. His gang used oxen teams and wheelbarrows to clear the right of way and build the dump. Mr. William Sprinkles was foreman of the gang and in latter years became Marshal of Dexter.



About 1869 Dr. Dodd, Mose Wilburn, Mr. O'Shea, John Westers and J.R. Wilson built homes upon the hill east of Dex Creek, the part of town now known as Old Dexter. (*Old Dexter is Thrower street running south from the Dexter Cemetery to highway 25 near the Missouri Pacific Railroad.*)



Old Dexter

These people apparently thought the depot would be built there, but before any business houses were built, the railroad company built the depot where the present Missouri Pacific Depot now stands. The station was a two-story building. The agent lived upstairs. Joe Moran was Dexter's first depot agent.



After the depot was built the railroad company laid out the town cleared the timber to form streets. On July 4, 1873, they held a sale of lots. This was the largest gathering that had ever been in the county up to that time. The lots sold from \$25 up to \$300. Most of these lots were covered with water. On the day of the sale, J.J. Dowdy one of our present businessmen, then a small boy, sold ginger cakes and sweet cider.

Three years after the railroad company began building the dump, the line was finished and the first train came through Dexter. A boy by the name of Andy Hill worked on this road as bolt boy. When the road was finished he began firing engines and fired the first one that came through Dexter. Mr. Hill is still working on this railroad as an engineer on a passenger train. He is 74 years old and reads his orders without glasses.

Dexter's first business houses were built on the north side of the railroad, just about where Mr. Culberson now has a blacksmith shop. *(The first business houses were located where Webber's motors is now and on to the north for a short distance.)*

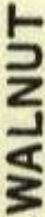
Business was carried on in these houses for a number of years, but were abandoned when business houses were erected on the south side of the railroad.

Robert Liles came from Bloomfield and build a large store building where Evan's Garage now stands.

A little later Seisel and Plaut built a store building on the corner where the Citizens Bank now stands. *Citizens bank stood on the northeast corner of Walnut and Stoddard streets.*



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On the Peters lot stood a large building built by Bracken's and Doherty. These men had a stock of general merchandise in the lower story.

The upper story was used as a boardinghouse known as the Planters Hotel. *Planters Hotel was located where Cleo's Sinclair station now stands.*



The first drug store in Dexter was built by Quince Slack. In later years he sold his building and stock to J.J. Dowdy. Mr. Dowdy moved this building away and erected a brick building where he is still in business. It is hard for us to realize that the J.J. Dowdy who sold ginger cakes and sweet cider to the people that were here for the sale of lots in 1873, serves us drinks.



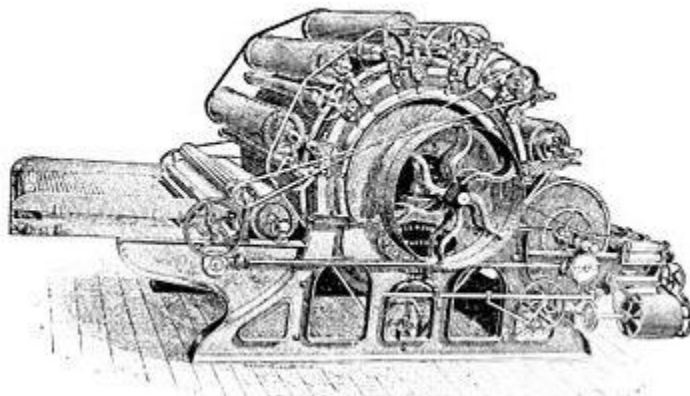
The first grocery store and Dexter was owned by Mr. Ed Carter and his father. This building stood about the center of the block where the First National Bank now stands. (*The First National Bank was on the south side of Stoddard street, east of the old Rexall drug store or the third door to east from the corner of Stoddard and Walnut streets.*) These men were a brother and father to Mr. Gilbert Carter.



Mr. Wagner built on the site now occupied by A. J. Sherwood's store. (*A. J. Sherwood's store was just west of Webber's Ben Franklin store.*) Mr. Wagner sold his stock to Josiah Dowdy and his son John A. Dowdy.

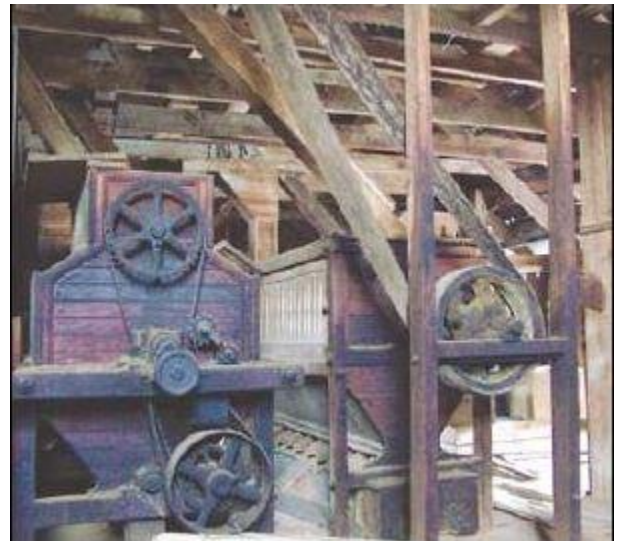
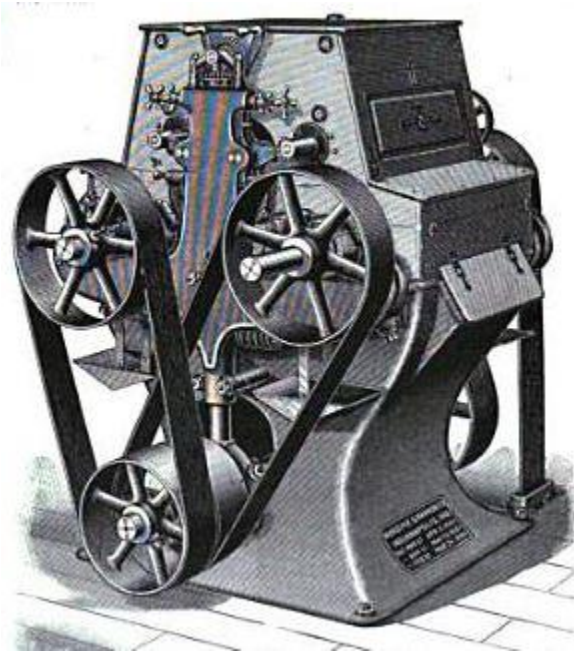
Norman Reagan's and his father built a store on the south side of the street from J. N. Millers store. Mr. Ed Weber bought this stock.

In 1874 Andy Cooper and his father build a large mill on the west bank of Dex creek. Here they ground wheat and corn. They had a carding a machine that made wool rolls and also had a cotton gin and press. They ran a sawmill here that cut most of the lumber used in the erection of Dexter's first business houses.



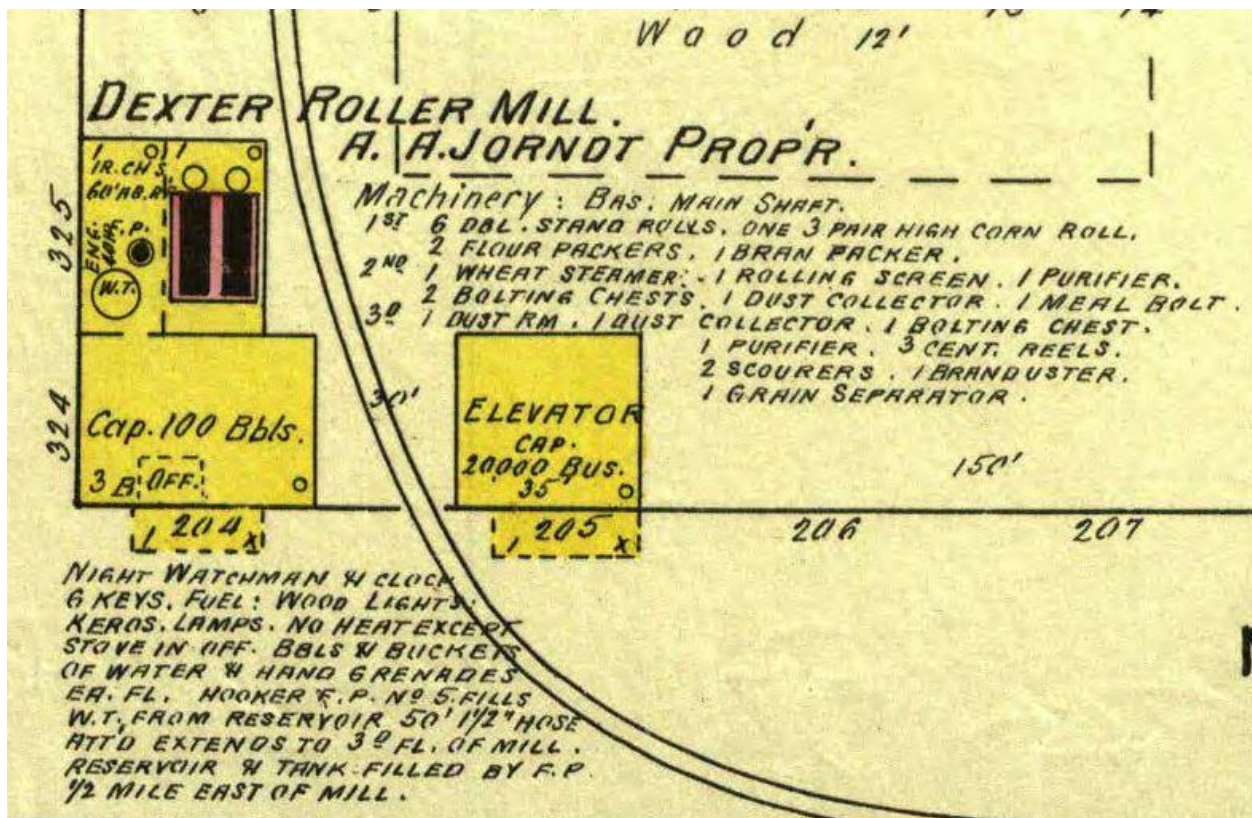
Wool Carding Machine

In the year 1886 Andy Cooper formed a partnership with Mr. Albert Jorndt and built the first roller process flouring mill. This was the first mill of its kind in the county and people came from miles around to see this mill work. This same mill is now owned by the Scott County Milling Company. *The flour mill Scott County Milling company (now Cargill) is at the same location.*



Roller Process Flouring Mill





Flour Rolling Screen



Flour Dust Collector

John Buck and Marion Neal bought a stock of goods at Miller's mill and put it in a building where Brentlinger and Steele now have their offices.

Dexter now has about 66 business firms.

In early days Dexter had a transfer company which was very different from our Dexter transfer company of today. It was a Dray pulled by an oxen team. The streets were so muddy that horses could not pull a loaded wagon through them.

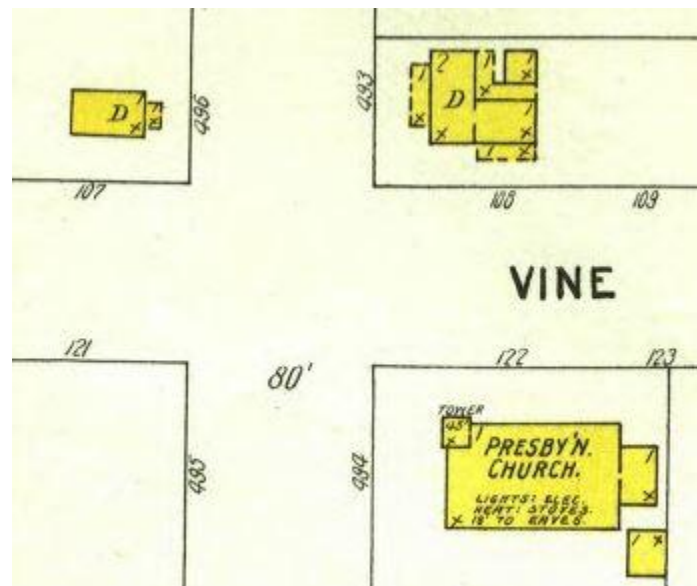


Our first post office was in a drug store owned by Robert McClane. The postmasters name was a Mr. McAnally. The mail was carried from Dexter on the Star routes, north and south by men on horseback. Mr. John Crytes, the father of Mrs. J.J. Dowdy, was one of the first mail carriers. This post office and drugstore stood where F. M. Tucker now has a meat shop.

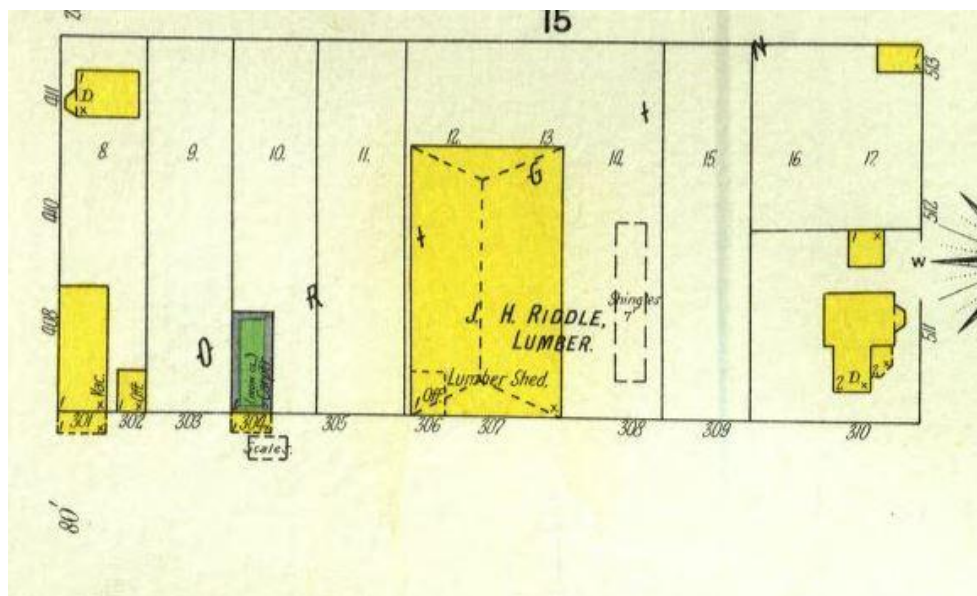
David Crytes built a home just south of the Iron Mountain depot. It was Dexter's first residence. This house was remodeled and is still used as a residence. It stands just east of the Jeffersonian Hotel. *The David Crytes home (Heritage House) was located on the south side of West South Main Street across the street from the Missouri Pacific depot. The Jeffersonian Hotel was also located across the street south from the Missouri Pacific depot.*



The Presbyterians organized a church in John Sitton's workshop, on the Bloomfield road, in the year 1857. This church was known as "Mount Union". During the Civil War it was disorganized, but reorganized in 1870. They then held their meetings in the community building. In 1891 they went into the new building which they had begun in 1890. The first church had 15 charter members. The Presbyterians had just entered a new \$35,000 church house.

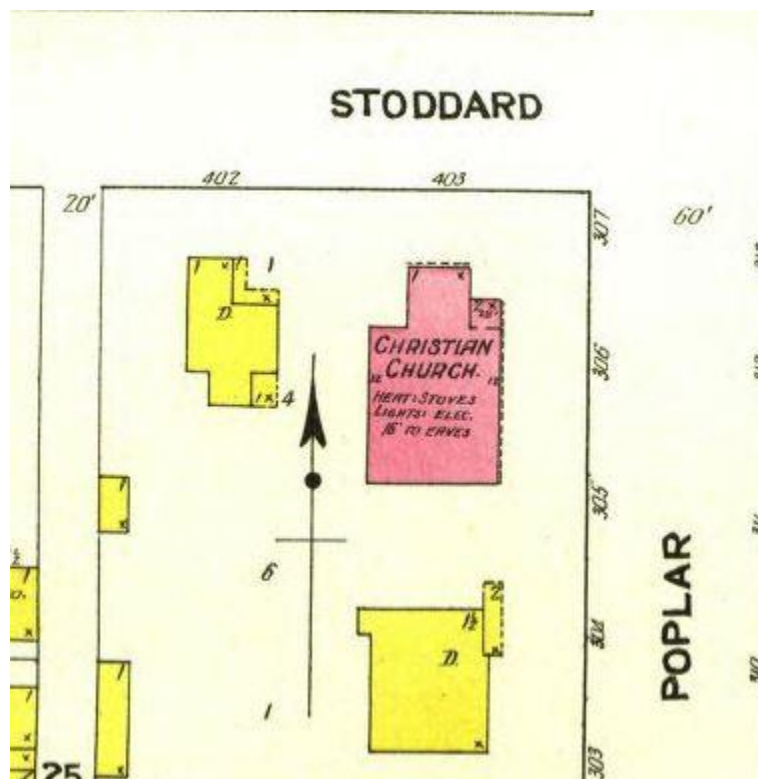


The M. E. church, south of Dexter, was organized at the Hagy graveyard, about 2 miles north of Dexter. This church was organized before the town was laid out. After the year 1874, the Methodist people erected a church on the corner of the lot where George Riddle's lumberyard is now located. (The George Riddle lumberyard was located on East North Main Street in the first block west of the Armory.)

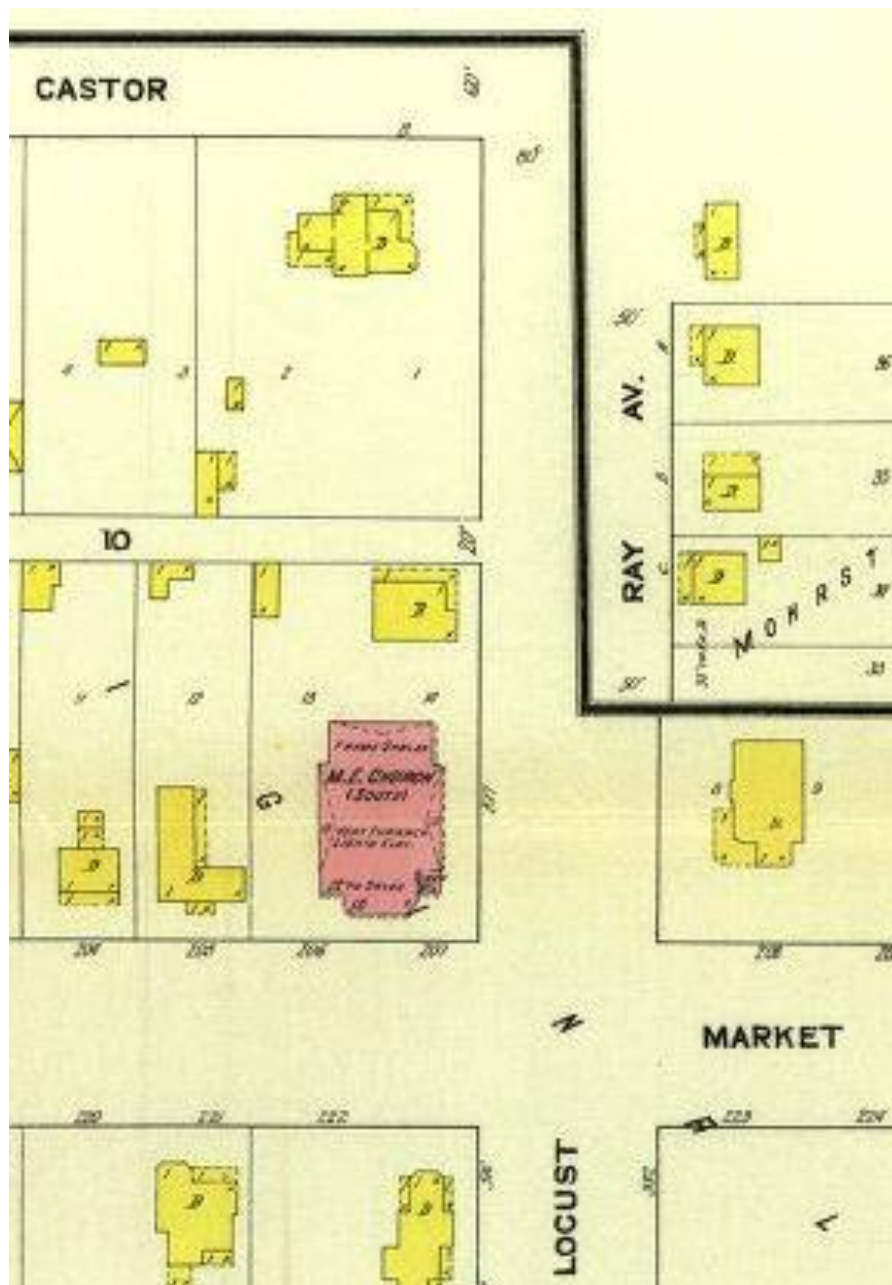


Presbyterians and Methodists used this building together. The Methodists moved this building in 1891, to the corner where Mrs. Burris now lives. In 1906 the congregation erected a large brick building and moved into it in 1907. The Community Church was sold to the General Baptist, who are now using it as their church. In 1911 this new church burned and in 1912 the present building was erected. The charter members were Mrs. T. J. Ylen, Mrs. T. J. Hill, Mrs. McGlothlin, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Copeland, Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Kirkpaterick and F. M. Ladd. *The Ladd Lumber Company was located along the north side of the alley that runs between North Locust and North Elm and faced North Locust Street. The parking lot is located there now.*

Bros G. Kitchen secured from the Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad Company a deed to three lots to be used as a place for a Christian Church to be built. He purchased and rebuilt the old public school building. He then moved it to the grounds he had secured. An 1884 they organized and remained without pastor for several years. An 1889 they secured Elder Stevenson as pastor. Sometime in 1890 they built the present church building. They had 35 members at this time.



The Dexter Baptist Church organized in 1884. They held meetings in the Methodist community house until they went into their new church which was dedicated in 1895. The charter members were Mrs. Missouri Renner, Mr. and Mrs. Jason Wilson, Mrs. John Cryts, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Wilson, and Mrs. L. K. Culbertson. The pastor at this time was W. A. Jones. This church was moved away and the Baptist people moved into the present building in 1922. *The First Baptist Church was located on the south side of the old Baptist Church (1981) where the parking lot is now located.*



In the last few years other churches have been organized; the Catholics, Two General Baptist, a Nazarene, and the Pentecostal Church.

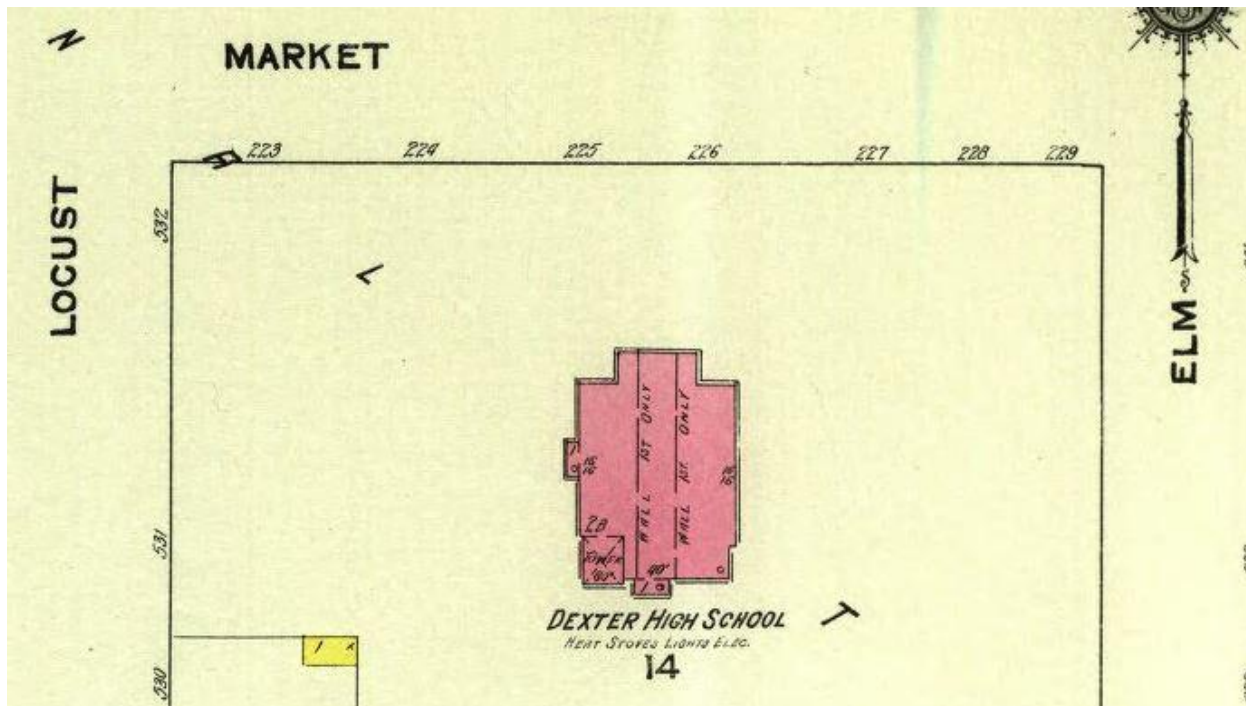
Dexter's first school was held in a building north of the Iron Mountain depot the teacher's name was Mr. Peverest.

The second school was held in a one room box building that stood in Old Dexter.

In 1874 a school building was built south of where J. M. Cook's home now stands. It was a one room building and had two teachers, Emma Grafton and Bill Phelen. In order for them both to teach at the same time, they had part of the seats facing one end of the building, and the others facing the opposite end. This room was heated by a 30 inch box stove with a big drum. Mr. Flynn and Mr. McNail followed the two ladies as teachers. A few of the other teachers were, a Mr. Duncan, Mr. Jennings, Lanesdale Luny, a George Smith, Lillian Carries, and Mrs. Albert Copeland, then a Miss Dowdy. This school building was later sold to the Christian Church. They moved it to the site where the present Christian Church now stands. When Mrs. Piola Moore's home burned, they deeded her this building. Mrs. Moore went to school in this building was converted in it and used it as her home until it burned.

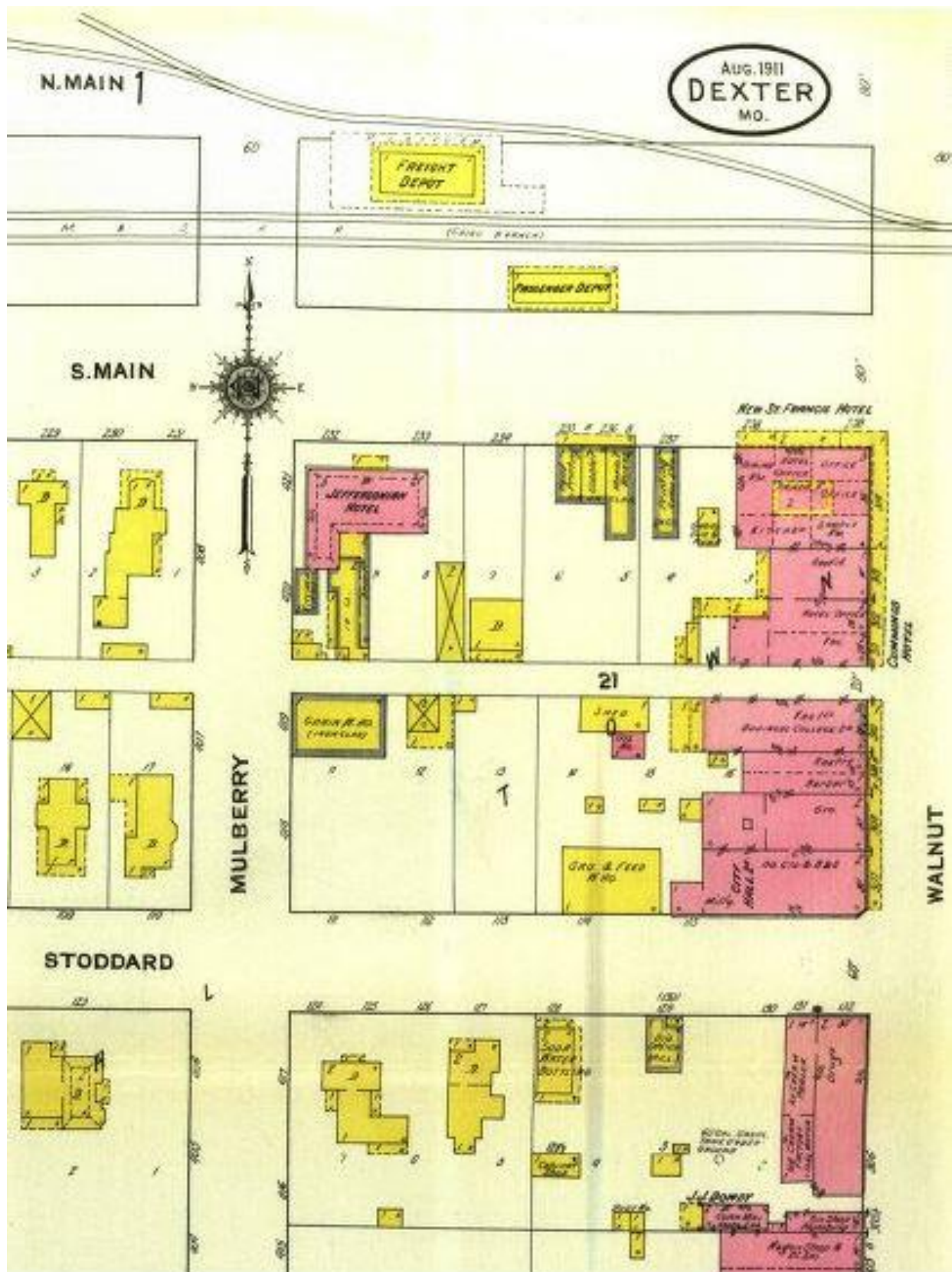
In 1880 a four room brick building was built on the site where our public school now stands. Mrs. O. E. Smith, now of Bloomfield was Dexter's first Principal. This school became so crowded they were forced to add a wing. At this time there were about 300 pupils. Some of the early teachers were Randal, Carrie Lee Carter, Anna Kitchen, Lizzie Leach, Clara Carter, Professor Humprey, professor C. M. Hall, A. J. Sherwood, T. N. Norman, Mrs. Candace Fort and Nellie Carter. This building became too crowded.

In 1903 this building was torn down and the present building was erected. Mr. A. S. Boucher was employed as superintendent and renamed as such for 15 years. During this time he helped to raise our school from an elementary school to a first class one with a four year high school, offering teacher training and business courses. We are now planning to use our present High School building as a Junior High, just as soon as our new \$60,000 High School is finished.



Dexter's first cemetery was near where Rex Day's home now stands. Several of the bodies were moved to our present cemetery. *The first Cemetery was located on the hillside, at the south end of Elm street where Grant Street goes east to Highway 25.*





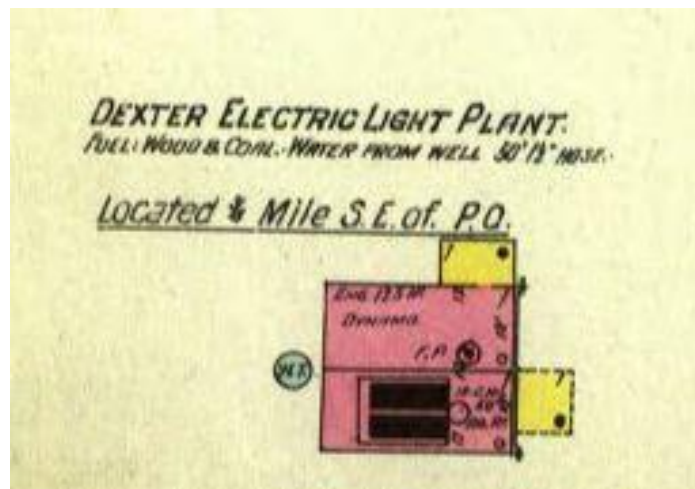
Our first hotel was built by Colonel Jeffers, on the corner where the Jeffersonian hotel now stands. It was a two story frame building and when completed Colonel Jeffers gave a large ball to dedicate it. The hotel burned and Mr. Jeffers then erected the present Jeffersonian hotel.

Mr. Stokes ran Dexter's first newspaper. The printing office stood at the west end of what is now Evan's Garage. He later moved to a little frame building, now used by Goodwin and Jean as a feed house. Mr. Stokes' paper was called the "Enterprise Messenger". Later Mr. Webb Watkins owned this paper which was known as the "Dexter Messenger". Mr. Calvert owns this paper. Mr. Ed Crowe runs Dexter's other paper, the "Dexter Statesman".

Our first doctors were Dr. Dodd and E. W. Hill. The first mayor of Dexter was Tom Brown from Bloomfield. The first Marshall was Wash Davis.

Our first bank was the Stoddard County Bank. In the year 1886 two men came from Fulton Kentucky and organized this Bank. Their one idea was to rob the people. The stockholders saw their scheme and saved the bank, as it was said "overnight".

In 1893 a man by the name of Hawkes came from Puxico, and by an agreement with the businessmen of Dexter, was to put in an electric light plant. He wired a few buildings, but never completed the work. In 1895 Dexter sold bonds and built the plant under the hill on the south side of town. Later it was sold to Mr. Echoltz who sold it to the present owners, the Missouri Public Utility Company.

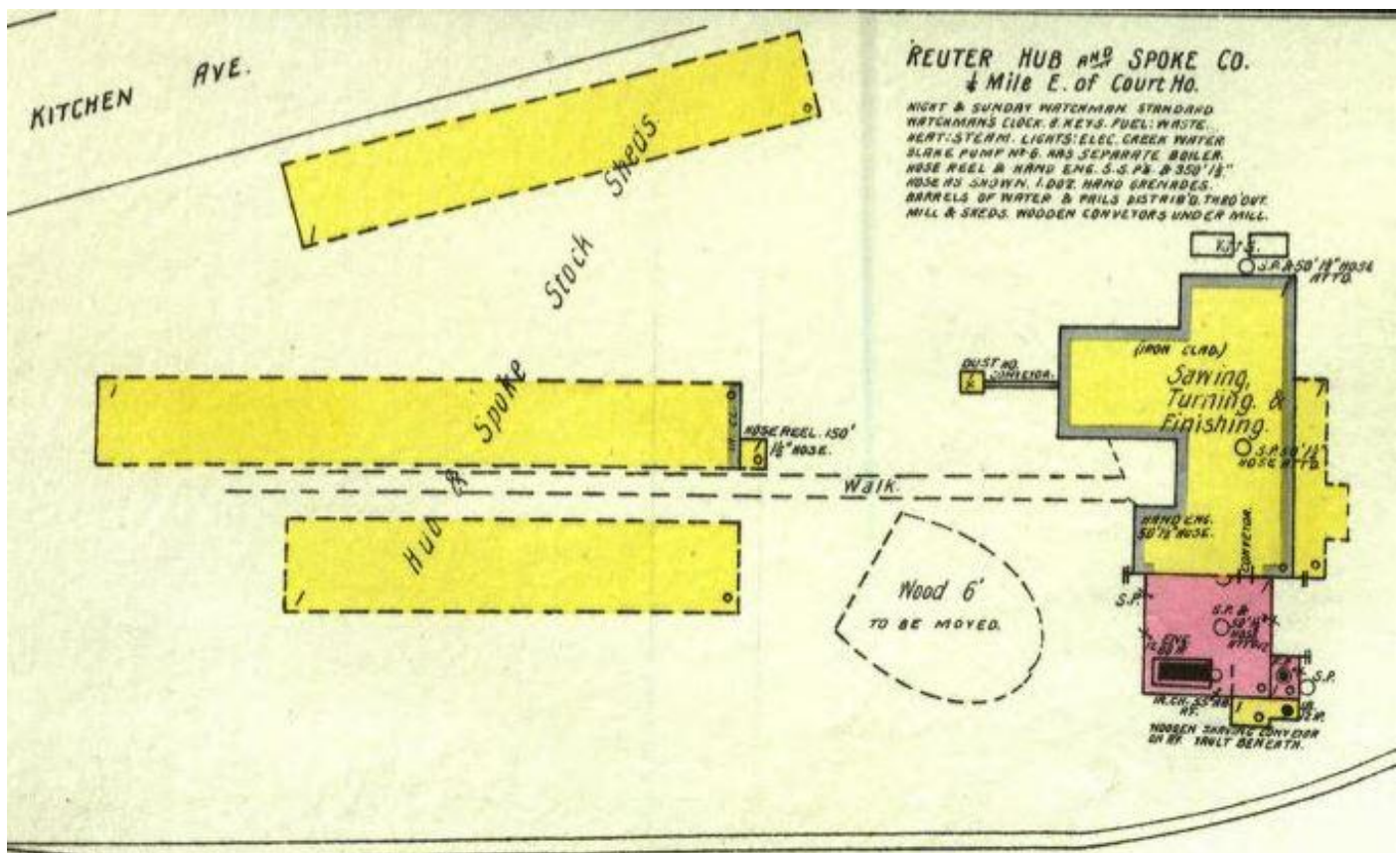


About the year in 1897 Mr. E. C. Mohrstadt built the first telephone system in Dexter. This was a private line and was sold to Mr. Taccott of Charleston. He later sold it to the Bell Telephone Company.

About 1895, a Mr. McCurry was elected to represent Stoddard County. He had a law passed that allowed Dexter and Bloomfield each, a term of court during the year. In this year Dexter and the vicinity built the courthouse in Dexter. There was one term of court held here, when a Mr. Chasteen was elected to the legislature and had this law repealed. This courthouse stood vacant for several years. It was then given to the Christian Church for a college with the understanding that they must spend \$10,000 on improvements in 10 years. In later years this building was bought from the Christian Church Board by the Dexter School District. It was repaired and is now used as Dexter High School.

The first fair in the county was organized in 1892. It was called the Stoddard County Agricultural and Mechanical Association. This fair was held here for some eight or ten years.

The downtown water fountains were placed there by the Women's Christian Temperance Union. They were tired of hearing that the saloon was the only place to get a drink of water; therefore, they needed to remain open. The Dexter Commercial Club was an active group in supporting Dexter's growth. They were instrumental in securing the Reuter Hub and Spoke Company as one of Dexter's first industries.



The Dexter assembly was established in Dexter on August 8, 1900. It being the first Chautauqua assembly ever held in Stoddard county or Southeast Missouri. (*Chautauqua was an adult education movement in the United States, highly popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Named after Chautauqua Lake where the first was held, Chautauqua assemblies expanded and spread throughout rural America until the mid-1920s. The Chautauqua brought entertainment and culture for the whole community, with speakers, teachers, musicians, entertainers, preachers and specialists of the day. Former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt was quoted as saying that Chautauqua is "the most American thing in America."*) This assembly was held on grounds owned by Mr. Albert Carter. Each assembly lasted for 10 days and during this time many people camped on the grounds. In 1906 Mr. JA Montgomery, now one of our successful farmers spoke at the assembly on the News Settlers Day.

By Veda Ladd Neff

